

The Adults and Aged in Nigeria

Issues and Researches

Edited by
Helen O. Osinowo
Olawale A. Moronkola
Deborah A. Egunyomi



**THE ADULTS AND AGED IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND
RESEARCHES**

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Special Note: The ideas and contents of each chapter does not necessarily reflect the ideas of Network For Health, Education and Welfare of Special People, Ibadan, Ibadan, but solely that of each author.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all adults and aged in Nigeria.

Preface

Network for Health, Education and Welfare of Special People, Ibadan is a not-for-profit organisation interested and committed to the health, education and welfare of people in peculiar or special needs.

The vision of the organisation is to improve the education, health and welfare of needy individuals through research, training, education, community work, communication, advocacy, sensitization and other services to meet the needs of children, women, men, adolescents and aged who have one particular need or the other.

Between 26th and 29th May, 2010 at the Conference Centre, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, scholars in the field of law, education, medicine, psychology, social work, theology etc participated in a National Conference organized by our organization focusing on "The Adults and Aged in Nigeria".

We thank the Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Prof. Yemisi Bamgbose, Prof. Helen Osinowo, Head Dept. of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Dr. Deborah Egunyomi, Acting Head, Dept. of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan as well as other scholars across the country for their participation and immense support to the success of the conference.

The papers presented at the conference were peer reviewed, and those found publishable were later edited before its publication in this book form. We commend this authoritative book to all stakeholders and invite all to attend our conferences.

Prof. O.A. Moronkola, JP
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and Welfare of Special People,
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CONTENTS

	Pages
Dedication	v
Preface	vi
 Section A: Issues on Adults and Aged	
1. The adults and aged: The Nigerian situation- <i>D. A. Egunyomi , Dept. of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.</i>	1
2. Social work and welfare of the aged in Nigeria- <i>J.K. Mojinyinola, & J.A. Ayangunna, Dept. of Social Work, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.</i>	17
3. Remediating the old people's home prototype by elder daycare facility: A concept in elderly care initiative for adoption in the Nigerian context - <i>I. K. Evbuoma, Covenant University, Ota.</i>	30
4. Caring for the aged from Islamic perspectives- <i>M.A. Akindoyin, Dept. of General and Islamic Studies, Crescent University, Abeokuta.</i>	42
5. Coping with learning in adulthood: The role of physical activity and health promotion. - <i>E.C. Agbanusi E.J.,Ibeagha, J.O., Ojo-Ajibare, G.O. Emeahara, & E.N. Emeahara, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka.</i>	60
6. Exercise and recreation: An essential tool for ensuring healthy ageing in Nigeria - <i>S.O,Olanrewaju, I.O. Tajudeen & A. Baba Dare, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.</i>	75

7. Application of self-concept development strategy for adaptation to health challenges at old age -
S. A. Okueso, & F.A. Adebisi, *University of Ibadan, Ibadan.* 84
8. Adults, aged and cultural issues in Yoruba films-
O. Adagbada, *Dept. of Nigerian and Foreign Languages and Literatures, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye.* 95
9. Meeting the challenges of ageing: The way forward -
A.K. Akinmusere, *Dept. of Physical and Health Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.* 116
10. Poverty and old age: The Nigerian situation -
A. M. Gesinde, O. A. Adekeye, & T. C. Iruonagbe, *Dept. of Psychology, Covenant University, Ota.* 127
11. Emerging issues in counselling adult learners in Nigeria - A. M. Gesinde, *Dept. of Psychology, Covenant University, Ota.* 145
12. The use of moderate exercise and physical activity for the promotion of good health and longevity of adults and the aged - T. O. Ayoade, *Dept. of Physical and Health Education, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto-Ijanikin.* 156
13. Developing a positive attitude towards de-phasing elder abuse and its health implications - D. O. Adeniji, & D. A. Oladejo, *The Polytechnic Ibadan, Saki Campus, Saki.* 167
14. Drama and HIV/AIDS education in Nigeria- O. Elegbe, *University of Ibadan, Ibadan.* 184

15. Older adults and healthy sexuality - *P.O. Akinbile, A.E. Bernard & J.O. Adelusi , Dept. of Physical and Health Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.* 201
16. The economic implications of aging population - *J. I. Wojuade, J. K. Fakeye, & M. T. Adekanmbi , Dept. of Social Studies, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo.* 212
17. The malthusian theory and the problematic strong human sex drive: Implications for family planning - *U. Igbudu, Dept. of Health, Environmental Education and Human Kinetics, University of Benin, Benin City.* 225
18. Need for rural information and healthy tips for the aged population for economic development in the Niger Delta, Nigeria - *Awala-Ale Isabella Idomu & B.S.U. Ogharaerumi, College of Education, Warri.* 233
19. The aged and health challenges-*Ademiju Pauine Urenwa, Michael Otedola College of Education, Nforija.* 253
20. Creating awareness of risk factors and preventive measures of diabetes mellitus among adults in Nigeria: Panacea for maintaining healthy life - *A. Ibhafidon, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.* 264
21. Preparing future entrepreneurial adults in Nigeria through counselling today's in-school adolescents - *A.O. Ariyibi, Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, Sheda, Abuja.* 278
22. Health problems of the aged - *P.F. Adekunle, Osun State College of Education, Ilesa.* 293

23. Psychological consequences of poverty and violence against women - *A.O. Busari, Federal College of Education, Ondo.* 304
24. Healthy and successful aging: Psycho-social and health perspectives – *H.O. Osinowo, Dept of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.* 325
25. Physical activity and the psychological well-being of the aged - *K. A. Aderonmu, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.* 344
26. The challenges of social security for the aged in community development programmes in Nigeria- *I. A. Abiona, Dept. of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.* 362

Section B: Researches on Adults and Aged

27. Management of professionalism and career development among adult education practitioners in Nigeria - *J. E. Oghenekohwo, Dept of Educational Foundations, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island.* 379
28. Health problems of the aged in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State - *O.A. Moronkola, & C.C. Eziuzor, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.* 388
29. Assessment of sexual orientation and sexuality of the aged - *U. Igbudu, Dept. of Health, Environmental Education and Human Kinetics, University of Benin, Benin City.* 400
30. Age, marital status, gender and job status as determinants of life satisfaction among the elderly in Nigeria - *Adejumo Gbadebo Olubunmi, Dept. of Psychology, Covenant University, Ota.* 408

31. Impact of ageing on professional development of teachers in primary schools in Imo State - *C. I. Ihebereme, Dept. of Education Foundations and Administration, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.* 419

32. Physical exercise as correlates of graceful ageing among retired teachers in Kwara State - *A.E. Talabi, R.A. Shehu, T.O. Ibraheem & Y.A. Ajeigbe, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.* 429

33. Influence of geriatric and social support care on health of elderly people in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State - *E.A. Ogunsakin, R.A. Shehu, & A. Baba Dare, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.* 441

34. Nutritional practices of older workers in oil and gas companies in Port Harcourt - *G. O. Ekenedo, & G. O. Obiechina, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt.* 452

35. Factors influencing the prevalence of health problems of elderly people in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State - *S. O. Oniyangi, R. A. Shehu & A. Baba Dare, Dept. of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.* 463

36. Challenges of ageing as perceived by residents of Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, Edo State of Nigeria - *E. B. Peremene, Dept. of Health, Environmental Education and Human Kinetics, University of Benin, Benin City.* 474

Section A

Issues on Adults and Aged

Poverty and Old Age: The Nigerian Situation

A. M. Gesinde, O. A. Adekeye, & T. C. Iruonagbe

Abstract

The challenge facing the elderly in Nigeria is one that has been very persistent. One notable variable that has been used in describing the elderly is that of persistent and excruciating levels of poverty. Nigeria has often been described as a rich nation inhabited by poor people, to which the majority of the aged belong. Indeed, the poverty situation of the elderly, whether in relative or absolute terms, is quite disturbing. The inability of government to cope with the regular payment of pensions to the retired workforce, the inadequate social services and health facilities to cater for the needs of an ageing population, as well as a predominantly rural agrarian population all pose new threats to food security, social security and national security of Nigeria. Older people's lives are characterized by growing inadequacies in customary family supports, social exclusion and non-existent social security targeted at them, thus being very vulnerable to poverty and diseases. This paper therefore takes an exploratory look at the debilitating situation of the interplay between poverty and old age and tries to proffer solutions that will act as suitable intervention strategies towards amelioration the poverty situation of the elderly, majority of whom live like beggars' in the cities and various rural settlements.

Introduction

The number of persons aged 60 and over has been increasing at an unprecedented rate (UN, 2010). The United

Nations (1991) rightly affirmed that the world is ageing, and this presents a major policy issue for the world. In Africa, ageing is a crisis that is just beginning to reveal its shape and at present, it is a family affair (Apt and Greico, 1994). Nigeria is by far the largest country in Africa and is among the ten most populous countries in the world (FGN, 2004; UN, 2005). Nigeria's population has ranged from about 89 million persons (1991) to 140 million (2003). According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), Nigeria's population is estimated at about 140 million. Life expectancy at birth stands at 52 years. Population growth rate in Nigeria is determined by several factors; fertility, mortality and migration (FGN, 2004).

Nigeria's population is estimated to be growing at 2.9 percent annually and at that rate, Nigeria's population will double in size in about 24 years (FGN, 2004). The total population aged 60 and above. Nigeria is a federal Republic composed of 36 states and a federal capital territory. As noted by Ajomale (2007), the Federal Government exercises power and the economy by directing affairs of the country. Nigeria is culturally heterogeneous, with over 250 linguistic groups with the predominant ones being Hausa of the North, Yoruba of the South West and Igbo of the East. All share a similar cultural background and a similar perception of care for older persons.

While ageing has drawn considerable attention in developed societies for a very long time, in developing countries it has thus far barely been perceived as a demographic change whose occurrence is only a matter of time. It goes beyond the small proportion of the population currently projected in the population projections for African countries (Apt, 2000). Ageing has become a global phenomenon, and Nigeria is not an exception. While ageing in developed countries evolved gradually over a long period, an earlier decline in fertility and improving living

the majority of the population over a relatively long period of time after the industrial revolution, population ageing in developing nations is occurring more rapidly because of rapid fertility decline and an increasing life expectancy (Ajomale, 2007; Kinsella & Phillips, 2005).

Nigeria, like other African countries, sees these emerging issues as a serious future challenges. The inability of governments to cope with regular payment of pensions to the retired workforce, the inadequate social services and health facilities to cater for the needs of an ageing population, as well as a predominantly rural agrarian population all pose new threats to food security, social security and national security of Nigeria (Ajomale, 2007). A growth in the numbers of older people inevitably has brought an increase in the range and intensity of their problems and needs. But the worldwide phenomenon of ageing also brought an acknowledgement by the United Nations (UN) of the many challenges regarding aging and national development, issues concerning the sustainability of families and the ability of states and communities to provide for aging populations (UN, 2002). Older persons in Nigeria suffer a lot of hardship in an increasingly hostile, competitive and intolerant society. They also constitute the poorest group in Nigerian society.

The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the Nigerian government has little or no consideration for them. Having the rate of poverty and hunger by 2015 without seriously considering older people will affect the success rate of the otherwise well-conceived programme. We live in an ageing world. While this has been recognized in developed countries, it is only recently that the phenomenon has been fully acknowledged in Nigeria which is reflected in the NEEDS document. Nigeria has also come to the recognition that ageing is a global phenomenon affecting every man, woman and child, and that the steady increase of older groups in national population, both in absolute numbers and in relation

to the working-age population, has a direct bearing on the inter-generational and intra-generational equity and solidarity that are the foundation of society (Iroegbu, 2007). As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria currently has the highest number of older persons population in Africa (Joubert & Bradshaw, 2006; Kinsella and Velkoff, 2001). With the largest population in Africa and the ninth in the world, it is estimated that by the year 2025 (see table 1) the population of Nigerians aged 60 and above would constitute 6 percent of the entire population.

Table 1: Projected Population of Ageing in Africa from 2005 – 2050

Region	Population 60+ (per cent)			Population 60+ (millions)		
	2005	2025	2050	2005	2025	2050
Africa	5.2	6.4	10.0	47.4	85.8	19.9
West Africa	4.7	5.5	9.0	12.0	21.8	51.6
Nigeria	4.9	6.0	9.9	6.4	11.5	25.5

Source: UN Population Division, 2005

There is the potential for a rapid growth rate of the older population in the coming years, with a lower growth rate among the younger population and the implication is a major change in the age structure of Nigerian society (Ajomale, 2007).

Poverty in Nigeria

Alleviating old-age poverty requires approach from other age groups because policies that go through labour and output markets and educational and training programmes are ineffective (Dethier, Pestieau and Ali, 2010). At the international level, surprisingly little evidence is available on poverty in old age. For example, in its statistical publications, the World Bank does not report poverty rates for all age groups (World Bank, 2005). As noted by Dethier, Pestieau and Ali (2010), poverty in old age can still be observed even in countries that have generous transfers for the elderly including targeted minimum pensions.

Poverty is a multifaceted concept which manifests itself in different forms depending on the nature and extent of human deprivation. In absolute terms, poverty suggests insufficient or the total lack of basic necessities of life; food, housing and medical cares. It embraces the inadequacy of education and environmental services, consumer goods, recreational opportunities, neighbourhood amenities and transport facilities. In relative terms, people are poverty-stricken when their income fall radically below the community average (*World Bank*, 2000). The poverty situation in Nigeria is quite disturbing. Both the quantitative and qualitative measurements attest to the growing incidence and depth of poverty in the country (Okunmàdewa, Yusuf & Omonona, 2005). This situation, however, presents a paradox considering the vast human and physical resources that the country is endowed with. It is even more disturbing that despite the huge human and material resources that have been devoted to poverty reduction by successive governments, no noticeable success has been achieved in this direction.

The bitter reality of the Nigerian poverty situation, according to NISER (2003) is that more than 40 percent of Nigerians live in conditions of extreme poverty, spending less than N320 *per capita* per month. This expenditure would barely provide a quarter of the nutritional requirements for healthy living. There is no concise way of defining the concept of poverty, as it is a multi-dimensional issue that affects many aspects of human condition ranging from physical to moral and psychological (Ogwumike, 2002). Poverty status is therefore dependent on the inadequate physical functioning such as hunger, lack of shelter and lack of warmth and inadequate social functioning such as alienation, shame and lack of self-respect. Capabilities are therefore associated with such elements as the standard of living and the broader aspects of the ability to be socially and economically useful. The interaction of entitlement and capabilities largely determine what people do and what they are (Dreze and Sen, 1990; Kanner, 1995).

It is internationally known and locally obvious that the poverty level in Nigeria as an African country is very high. In fact, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 2001 put poverty level in Nigeria at above 72%, with over 35% living below poverty line as defined by the UNDP. The poverty level in the country may have increased since IFAD's declaration going by:

- i. The increased numbers of unemployed college and university graduates in Nigeria.
- ii. Unacceptably high level of destitute and social miscreants (area boys and girls) on the streets and highways of major cities and highways.
- iii. Number of families in the rural areas that cannot afford to send their children to primary schools.
- iv. The teeming number of high school leavers that cannot afford to go to colleges or universities.

Ignoring the poor therefore means that over 72% of Nigerians may not be provided for pension-wise. And if we factor in the number of self employed and people employed by organizations with less than employees as defined by the Act and focused by most PFA's, the ratio of Nigerians outside of the Pension coverage may be as high as 85%. The implication is poverty at youth, as well as old age, and with current wave of lack or minimized parental care by grown children, the effect would be socially catastrophic for the Nation with the whole world moving towards poverty eradication.

Defining the Elderly

According to the 1991 census, the elderly, usually defined as persons 65 years and above, constitute about 3.3 percent of the population of Nigeria. In Nigeria, just as in other parts of the world, there are more older persons (65 years or older) in the rural areas as opposed to the urban areas (UN, 2010; FGN, 2004). Most developed world countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition

of 'elderly' or older person, but like many westernized concepts, this does not adapt well to the situation in Africa. While this definition is somewhat arbitrary, it is associated with the age at which one can begin to receive pension benefits. At the moment, there is no United Nations standard numerical criterion, but the UN agreed that cut-off is 60+ years to refer to the older population.

Although there are commonly used definitions of old age, there is no general agreement on the age at which a person becomes old. The common use of calendar agree to mark the threshold of old age assumes equivalent with biological age, yet at the same time, it is generally accepted that these two are not necessarily synonymous. As far back as 1875, in Britain, the Friendly Societies Act, enacted the definition of old age as, "any age after 50" yet pension schemes mostly used age 60 or 65 years for eligibility (Roebuck, 1979).

The UN has not adopted a standard criterion, but generally uses 60+ years to refer to the older population. Realistically, if a definition in Africa is to be developed, it should be either 50 or 55 years of age, but even this is somewhat arbitrary and introduces additional problems of data comparability across nations. The more traditional African definitions of an elder or 'elderly' person correlate with the chronological ages of 50 to 65 years, depending on the setting, the region and the country. Adding to the difficulty of establishing a definition, actual birthdates are quite often unknown because many individuals in Africa do not have an official record of their birth-date. In addition, chronological or "official" definitions of ageing can differ idely from tradiutional or community definitions of when a person is older. We will follow the lead of the developed world for better or worse, and use the pensionable age limit often used by government to set a standard for the definition. Lacking an accepted and acceptable definition in many instances the age at which a person became eligible for statutory and occupational retirement

pensions has become the default definition and 65 years are often used, despite its age which the origins and surrounding debate date from the end of the 1800's through the mid 1970s (1979 & 1989; Roebuck, 1979) Adding to establishing a definition, actual birthdates are unknown because many individuals in Africa have no official record of their birthdates.

The ageing process is of course a biological process which has its own dynamics, largely beyond human control. It is also subject to the constructions by which we make sense of old age. In the developed world, time plays a paramount role. The age of retirement is equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries said to be the beginning of old age. In the developing world, chronological time has little relevance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed markers of age are more significant such as the roles of people; in some cases it is the loss of role or physical decline which is significant in defining old age. In contrast to the chronological milestones and stages in the developed world, old age in the developing countries is seen to begin at the point when a person is no longer possible (Gorman, 2000).

Age classification varied between countries over time, reflecting in many instances the social and economic or functional ability related to the workforce rather than not as a reflection of the current political situation. Many times the definition is linked to the age of retirement, which in some instances was lower for women. This transition in livelihood became the basis for the definition of old age which occurred between the ages 45 and 55 years for women and between ages 55 and 65 for men (Thane, 1978). When does someone become old? According to Kinsella and Philips (2005), a

are used to describe people considered old, but there is an increasing awareness that the terms used should acknowledge the tremendous diversity inherent in a group of people whose ages can span a range of 40 or more years. Some gerontologists object to the terms "elderly" and "senior citizen" as inadequate generalizations that connote negative stereotypes, including social isolation, frailty, and physical and financial dependence. Study results published in 1980 provides a basis for a definition of old age in developing countries (Gascock, 1980). This international anthropological study was conducted in the late 1970's and included multiple areas in Africa. Definitions fell into three main categories: (i) chronology (ii) change in social role (i.e change in work patterns, adult status of children and menopause) and (iii) change in capabilities (i.e invalid status, senility and change in physical characteristics). Results from this cultural analysis of old age suggested that change in social role is the predominant means of defining old age. When the preferred definition was chronological, it was most often accompanied by an additional definition.

These results somewhat contradict the findings of a study conducted by Togonu-Bikersteth (1987; 1988) in Nigeria regarding perceptions about the onset of old age, younger and older age groups had similar responses regarding the chronological onset of old age with differences in the stated age for men and women. The results suggested that the generally accepted definition as similar to westernized definitions of old age; however, this was a unique community with culture-related norms that bestowed certain privileges and benefits at older ages. If one considers the self-definition of old age, which is old people defining old age, as people enter ages it seems their self-definitions of old age becomes decreasingly multifaceted and increasingly related to health status (Brubaker, 1975, Johnson, 1976 and Freund, 1997). While a single definition such as chronological age or social/cultural/functional markers is commonly used by amongst

others demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, economists and researchers, it seems more appropriate in Africa to use a combination of chronological, functional and social definitions. However, the challenge of how to incorporate a suitable multidimensional definition into the "pensionable age" concept remains.

Aged in the Context of Care and Family Structure

Kumar (1999) observed that several disadvantages associated with aging in old age makes the elderly population as one of the most vulnerable section of any society. One of such disadvantages includes changing traditional joint family structure which is having more repercussion on the elderly. Owing to the industrialization, urbanization and modernization, within the society, several structural changes are taking place, such as the ascribed status being replaced by the achieved status. Thus, filial responsibilities are weakening and the inter-personal and inter-generational relations are also getting strained. The family in Nigeria used to consist of members of the extended lineage: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, etc. Before "modernization" came to "destroy" the concept of the extended family system and replace it with the nuclear family, the extended family as a social structural phenomenon served more or less as a form of social insurance (traditional safety net) for old age).

Traditionally, according to FGN (2004), the extended family system has cared for the Nigerian elderly. Most aged person expects support from their relatives and friends, but most especially from their children, also traditionally, the need for old age security was one of the motivations for large family size in Nigeria. However, because of the declining economy, many children are no longer in a position to provide care and support for their aged parents (FGN, 2004). There is an observable progressive shift in function away from the traditional

family. Traditional functions of the family like care and social support to older family members have gradually decreased in the recent past due to economic problems, migration and influence by foreign culture. Family members however are unable to effectively cope with the challenges of daily living. Emphasis is now on the nuclear family of "me, my wife and my children" at the expense of other members of the wider family network, especially the older ones who look to the younger generation to provide them with economic security in old age. The government does not provide social security for older persons. These changes in family structure in Nigeria have caused gradual disintegration of the extended family and of the communal sense of living in Nigeria society (Ajomale, 2007).

Neglect of filial obligations due to these structural changes has further impoverished older people and created more physical and social distance between family members. A lot of these older people have resolved to beg in order to survive or getting employed as cleaners, security guards, load carriers, or petty traders. It is gratifying to note that social support traditionally given to older persons still exists: daughters and daughters-in-law coming to the rescue of older people – though sometimes with adverse effects to their own health and domestic relationship.

Traditionally, according to Ajomole (2007), the older persons have the family and the extended clan that dominates the communities. They represent their families in the Council of Elders' meetings where decisions are taken to regulate and promote the general interest of citizens and to administer the affairs of their communities. They used to play leadership roles in the society and were seen as repositories of wisdom. The elderly in the Nigeria society carry out traditional roles of guardians of the ancestral values, chief custodians of society's treasures and upholders of history, customs, folklores, cultural values, and wisdom. Older persons settle disputes and conflicts

arising from members of the family, based on their position, skills, knowledge, wisdom, vision and experience acquired along the journey to old age (Ajomale, 2007).

Needs of the Elderly in Nigeria

Care needs for the elderly in Nigeria requires the family to provide the needs for the survival of the older people. Family members provide food, shelter, clothing, drugs and other basic necessities. Children now play the most important role of providing economic security in old age. Older parents live in their adult children's homes and receive care. On the other hand, they support their children in taking care of their grandchildren. When they live in their own homes, grandchildren or other relatives often live with them to give support such as washing clothes, running errands, cooking meals and taking general care of the older people's environment. The decline in the economy, gradual disintegration of the extended family system, unemployment, increasing female employment to complement family income, as well as rural-urban migration all contribute to the noticeable decline in the level of care provided by the family in recent times. The participation of government at all levels, Federal, Regional (States) and Local Councils, in the provision of services to the older person is minimal. The Nigerian government and political leaders believe that the provision of care is the responsibility of families. Policy emphasis is more on young people, women and children (Ajomale, 2007).

A crucial problem is the general assumption in Nigerian society that care for older people has always been provided by the extended social/family system – and that this provision of care services has always been adequate. This assumption is wrong, as recent research has shown (Apt, 1995; Aboderin, 2006). Medical care is not easily accessible. Most elderly persons cannot afford quality medical care; the geographical distance to get to these services makes it difficult, if not impossible for